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March 9, 1959

MEMORANDUM OF CONFERENCE WITH THE PRESIDENT  
March 9, 1959 - 10:30 AM

Others present: General Twining  
General Goodpaster (for discussion of  
airborne alert exercise)  
Major Eisenhower



General Twining initially brought up the question of the proposed airborne alert exercise to be executed by the Strategic Air Command. This would be directed primarily toward the testing of procedures for airborne alert and would be done on a relatively modest basis. The Secretary of Defense approves of the conducting of such an exercise. The President had certain reservations with respect to this exercise, primarily in the light of the possibility that it might be construed as developing a continuing requirement. Therefore, representatives from the Departments of State and Defense and the AEC will meet with the President this afternoon at 2:30 for a complete briefing on this question.

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The President then brought up with General Twining a report which the President had seen in the newspapers relative to a written submission by the individual service chiefs concerning their additional needs at this time. This causes the President considerable concern in that he views this Congressional inquiry as a potential threat to a full promulgation of the mutual security program. He asked General Twining why it is not possible for the Joint Chiefs of Staff to speak out in more positive terms in favor of the mutual security program in order to keep our overall security needs in perspective. The discussions of individual service needs, without a positive support of the mutual security problem would destroy the perspective of our overall requirements.

General Twining expressed complete agreement with this viewpoint and told the President that he would bring this up with the Joint Chiefs in his meeting with them this afternoon. He expressed concern over the fact that the Chiefs of Staff are being required to appear before the Senate Military Preparedness Committee as a corporate body.

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General Twining then informed the President that some members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (General Twining does not concur) fear that we are not going far enough in responding to the Berlin crisis. Some of the Chiefs have recommended actions which General Twining considers provocative. The Joint Chiefs are going to see the Secretary of Defense prior to testifying before Congress and will benefit from his guidance at that time. General Twining remarked that Secretary McElroy's views on this matter are identical to those of the President.



The President then stressed the necessity to avoid over-reacting. In so doing we give the Soviets ammunition. The President stressed the view that Khrushchev desires only to upset the United States. He expressed once again his view that we must address this problem in terms, not of six months, but of forty years. During this time the Soviets will attempt continually to throw us off balance. First, they will hit the situation in Berlin. They will then go to Iraq, then to Iran, and then will attempt to worry us over the situation of the Kurds. They would like us to go frantic everytime they stir up difficulties in these areas. The President feels that we should stand on our program which we consider to be adequate. This program is based primarily on deterrence, our air power, our missiles, and our allies. We maintain at the same time the capability to deal with brush fire actions. The President admitted that we may miscalculate and become involved in a general war. However, he questioned the effectiveness of any crash military measures to alleviate this current Berlin situation. He feels the measure of raising the levels of Army forces in Europe by 10,000 over that currently planned is useless, except perhaps as a psychological measure. He feels that this is primarily going to give General Taylor ammunition for avoiding his programmed cut of 30,000. General Twining confirmed that General Taylor desires to keep those 10,000 men in Europe.

General Twining then referred again to the nature of the hearings. The President instructed him to caution the Joint Chiefs that the military in this country is a tool and not a policy-making body; the Joint Chiefs are not responsible for high-level political decisions. General Twining agreed, and again expressed his displeasure at the idea of the Joint Chiefs being called as a corporate body to testify before Senator Johnson's Committee. He is certain that Senator Johnson's lawyer will ask policy type questions of the Joint Chiefs. He went on to say that

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he has his own lawyers working on the legality of the Joint Chiefs being called as a body before Congress. Legally, the Joint Chiefs as a body are required to advise only the President and the Secretary of Defense. General Twining is perfectly willing to walk out of the meeting; however, he has discussed the matter with his own lawyers and has concluded that it is necessary to respond to this call to appear before the Johnson Committee. The Joint Chiefs will not discuss military planning or any other matters which are not Congressional prerogatives. He said again that Secretary McElroy is going to have a talk to the Joint Chiefs, while remarking that this procedure has not been uniformly successful in the past.

As the meeting was coming to a close, the President philosophized briefly on the difficulties of a democracy running a military establishment in peacetime. He reiterated his conviction of the value of mutual security and expressed as his greatest cause of concern the prospect that the Congress will twist the testimony of the Joint Chiefs as a pretext for cutting this vital program.



*John SD Eisenhower*  
John S. D. Eisenhower

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